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ABSTRACT

This "think piece" on ways to increase demand for learning in the United Kingdom is designed to stimulate debate among policy makers and managers in the new learning and skills sector. Section 1, on context, addresses these issues: low skill levels; delivering skills to employers; low adult participation; and negative attitudes. Section 2 identifies groups educators need to focus on to stimulate demand: captive audiences; boys and young men; young people leaving care; prisoners; and those with basic skill needs. Section 3 looks at these strategies to attract new learners: starting points (what learners want, communities, interest groups, existing knowledge and skills, and people's habits and desires); joining up the present system; media; marketing; engaging employers (developing a better system of vocational education, overcoming employers' reluctance to commit to employees' learning, carrots and sticks, and small and medium-sized enterprises); engaging employees (employee development programs, trade unions, guarantees, study in paid time, corporate university); financing learning (transport, loans, fees, individual learning accounts, incidental costs of learning, saving to learn, funding following learners, learning from others, financial barriers, and course support); reforming the supply side (initial education, promoting vocational education, and dealing with jargon); qualifications; and quality of teaching and learning. Section 4 lists actions for stakeholders. Appendixes include a glossary and 36 references. (YLB)

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## LSDA comments

# Stimulating demand for learning

## An ideas paper on attracting new learners

Ursula Howard



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**Note**
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was formerly known as FEDA.

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# Introduction

## Purpose

This 'think-piece' on ways to increase demand for learning is designed to stimulate wide debate among policy-makers and managers in the new learning and skills sector. It was produced for an international seminar, held in the UK in June 2001. A literature review, *Attracting new learners: a literature review* (Hillage and Aston 2001) was also prepared for the seminar.

We welcome any comments about the ideas presented in this report. All feedback should be sent to Sue Taylor at the Learning and Skills Development Agency (e-mail staylor@LSDA.org.uk).

## Rationale

For economic and social reasons, the UK needs to attract many more people into education and training. There is a particular need to attract those who have been out of touch with learning for a long time or who have benefited least from education and training in the past. The new Learning and Skills Council (LSC) framework for funding and planning provides an impetus to look afresh at ways to increase and widen participation.

The UK is at a time of systemic change in post-compulsory learning and so has the opportunity to look again at the demand for learning. The LSC was launched with a remit and powers that include the promotion of learning. The targets for further education and the Adult Basic Skills Strategy require massively increased participation. The government set out a vision for a 'learning society in the learning age' (DfEE 1998) and the Secretary of State for Education and Employment reiterated the vision in his remit letter to the Chair of the LSC (DfEE 2000a). The Department of Trade and Industry's White Paper *Our competitive future: building the knowledge-driven economy* (DTI 1998) emphasised the critical importance of knowledge and skills – specific and generic – for the 21st-century economy.

# Context

## Stimulating demand or unleashing demand?

There has been much work relating to stimulating demand in the UK learning market. Research, opinion polls and surveys, campaigns and initiatives have addressed the issue of participation. NIACE, the national organisation for adult learning, the FEFC's 'Widening Participation' initiative and the Campaign for Learning have been prominent in raising awareness and analysing the reasons why people do or do not participate in publicly funded education and training. There has been less attention to assembling evidence that directly signals action. For example, what triggers participation? And what has worked – in the recent or distant past, or in other places? However, many current top-down government-led supply-side initiatives have the need to stimulate demand at their heart: social inclusion, widening participation, employability, skills development, competitiveness, active citizenship and neighbourhood renewal. The target groups for these policies are seen in two different ways.

The first view sees problem people: millions of people are described as not learning, are 'non-learners', or make up 'hard-to-reach groups'. The focus here is particularly on people with 'poor basic skills', those who have low, or no, occupational skills and those who are 'excluded' and potentially a risk to law and order, to society and to themselves. The language of top-down policy-led stimulation of demand is too often couched in patronising, faintly finger-wagging language that is likely to reinforce people's sense of inadequacy and low confidence. This does not motivate people.

Alternatively, there is a view that while there may not be pent-up demand in the way there was for higher education in the 1980s and 1990s, there *are* positive attitudes to learning, and a great deal of informal learning. Much of this is private and self-funded. John Field, Professor of Lifelong Learning at Warwick University, argues that we are already living in a 'learning society', but the learning is happening elsewhere, increasingly focused on leisure activity and the personal priorities of individuals (Field 2000).

There is agreement, however, that many – the most vulnerable – remain indifferent. Their potential can be unlocked, steered and supported to encourage the development of skills and knowledge that will help the individual, the economy and social cohesion. This is what Ruth Silver, Principal of Lewisham College in London, calls 'learning unleashed'. The Learning and Skills Development Agency's recent research for the Department for Education and Skills (DfES, formerly DfEE) on the principles of successful working with 16–18 year olds not in education, training or work, suggests that respect for learners is an essential factor (Taylor 2000). Even where there are elements of a 'stick' approach, such as loss of benefit for non-participation, successful and creative schemes in, for example, the New Deal are based on a positive approach towards learners, and clarity about the outcomes they might expect.

We need to change mind-sets, radically. However, the culture change that is needed is at least as much a culture change for the supply-side: policy-makers, funders, providers and teachers. Perhaps we are the 'hard-to-reach' for those who do not connect to the learning system. The language we use still has the feel of the missionary society and the military campaign. It is riddled with jargon and assumptions that its meanings are evident to desired audiences – thus passing millions of people by. Perhaps the languages and practices of direct marketing, of inclusive active democracy and of citizenship would force a more self-critical but also more outgoing, risk-taking, upbeat stance towards the people we want to woo. Educators must first engage in self-critical learning.

## The issues

**Low skill levels**

Concern stems from the conviction that there is a deficit in the skills and qualifications needed for sustained economic competitiveness. Despite evidence that the UK is the fourth largest economy in the world and that it is a low-inflation economy, and despite claims that growth is sustainable and full employment still a realistic goal, there remain concerns about both skills and productivity compared to our competitors across the world.

**Delivering skills to employers**

A key element of the government's strategy, in response to the work of the National Skills Task Force, is to focus on the longer term. This includes the reform of systems and standards in schools and the reorganisation of post-16 learning to give a higher profile to skills, work-based training and workplace learning for adults.

A second element is tackling adult basic skills, and improving maths and IT competence, partly through the key skills strategy. These generic skills – along with science – are seen by all as essential to the knowledge-driven economy of the 21st century. The British are relatively poor at maths and other basic skills, falling behind nearly all other European countries (only Poland and Ireland are worse). Despite this, OECD reports show similar trends and problems across the western world and some Pacific Rim countries. The UK skills sector needs to learn from how others are tackling the problems (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation 2000).

A third element is a renewed focus on vocational education, through reform of 14-plus education in schools, the vocational A-level and the creation of a network of specialised, focused vocational centres in FE colleges. These policies could stimulate staying on – and adult demand – giving vocational learning a high profile in a renewed attempt to create parity of esteem between academic and vocational learning.

In terms of stimulating demand for skills, the government is adopting a strategy which harnesses economic imperatives to the equity agenda. Key aims include:

- prioritising part-time workers (80% of whom are women)
- breaking down barriers to access skills development (there is still serious resistance to women and minority ethnic groups in some industry sectors such as construction)
- prioritising workers with low qualifications, those with disabilities, people from minority ethnic groups, and those living in areas where major industries have declined or collapsed.

2 Stimulating demand for learning

Across the world, including in industrialised countries, there remains gender bias in access to education (Sutcliffe 2001). Stimulating demand for skills needs to address access to under-represented groups.

The analysis shows that, although higher skill levels bring economic returns, many social, financial and other factors intervene to prevent people taking up opportunities. These barriers need to be broken down. As noted by the DfES, the needs of individuals must be matched to provision. Winning employers' and unions' commitment to the skills agenda will be critical to stimulating demand for higher-level employee skills.

Finally, we need continuing research on the links between skills, economic performance and a healthy society in a global setting. Why is it that we need to attract high IT skills from India, a country with one of the lowest number of years in education per person? (Sutcliffe 2001). What is the impact on both countries? What are the implications for the UK's education and training system? We need to learn about the patterns of skills attainment elsewhere and the implications for UK skills development of a global market for knowledge and skills.

**Low adult participation:**
**'if at first you don't succeed, you don't succeed'**

That too few adults in the UK have the 'learning habit' is backed up by substantial research evidence (see, eg Beinart and Smith 1997; Kennedy 1997). This shows that people who have been successful in education go on learning, and that the less successful are far less likely to engage in formal learning. Among those who have done no learning since completing full-time initial education, 87% say they are unlikely to learn in the future. This figure has increased in the last 5 years (Sargeant 2000).

To this must be added the lack of substantial growth in further education and adult learning despite our increased knowledge of participation patterns and the skill needs of industry. Changes in the funding method relating to franchising have led to a drop in numbers participating in further education, notwithstanding widening participation initiatives designed to increase enrolments.

FEFC statistics show that between 1997/8 and 1999/2000 there was a fall of approximately 200,000 in the number of students attending courses run by FE colleges, from 3.92m to 3.72m. On the other hand, approximately 9% of the 40m people aged 15 or over in England attended FE colleges during 1999/2000 – a sound basis for imaginative new ways to gain a culture of participation.

**Negative attitudes**

What seems to single Britain out is its attitude to itself, which concentrates on failure. Does Ireland, for example, which has worse basic skills statistics, focus more on its continuing educational failures, or more on its economic and technological success? Ireland appears to take the positive view, and concentrates more on its status as an innovative, fast-growing economy and on celebrating the increasingly high pass rates of school leavers. Even the latter, in England, lead to annual soul-searching on falling standards and 'dumbing down'. An obsession with perpetuating hierarchies; a continuing focus on selection; the tolerance of social pecking orders based on class and educational attainment – all of these are deeply part of the UK culture that must be shifted. Potential learners are surely more likely to be attracted by images of a positive, open agenda that they can shape.

## Changing systems

The introduction of the learning and skills sector provides the opportunity to review the goals of the post-16 learning system. The goals set out in *Raising standards in post-16 learning* (DfEE 2000b) are directly relevant to stimulating demand. These are to:

- minimise drop-out rates and deliver high completion and achievement rates and appropriate progression
- ensure that competent and appropriately qualified staff deliver and assess learning
- offer equality of access to learning opportunities and close inequality gaps in learning and job outcomes.

Providers, however, need support and encouragement to be creative, imaginative risk-takers as well as rigorous on quality if they are to translate such goals into effective practices.

# Key groups: who are the reluctant and potential new learners?

This section identifies groups we need to focus on to stimulate demand.

## Captive audiences

There are less academically successful young learners already in the system who need help to continue in learning. Some 'demand' already exists in the system, but vulnerable groups of learners are destined to drop out and not come back. Less academically oriented, more vocationally motivated, 16 and 17 year olds are critical to skills development. These are the young people who have reached Level 1 with poor or no GCSE grades, or those who have very few GCSEs at Level 2. They are not deemed successful enough to be academic 'A-level material'. The problem can start at 14, when poorer learners are weeded out from GCSE grade A–C cohorts in the interests of school performance league tables. Learning opportunities and progression routes to further learning are poor and unexciting, and links to employment are weak in the system. The work-based route is not yet recognised as an attractive enough alternative. The review of the National Curriculum aims for greater inclusiveness through flexibility, but it does not fundamentally address the divisions in the system.

The powerful focus on Level 3 (A-level, Advanced Extension, the vocational A-level) on the one hand and the 7m adult basic skills learners on the other, leaves a hole in policy development and curriculum focus which results in failure to support these 'captive' learners effectively. They are forgotten and demotivated because of the value placed in our system on high-level academic learning, which permeates society's view of what constitutes success. However, the development of these learners is critical if we are to raise skills levels significantly, and to create social cohesion and personal fulfilment. Progression routes need to be strengthened so that higher-level skills at foundation degree and degree level can be reached. The concept of excellence in vocational education needs to be championed.

## Boys and young men

Some other countries do not suffer, as Britain appears to do, from the anti-achievement and anti-intellectual male peer-group culture. Major social and cultural shifts and changing employment patterns have created a less certain world for boys and men. Angela Phillips, in *The trouble with boys* (1993), offers a complex picture of isolated, confused young males clinging more to peer-group identity than to adult role models, in ways which hinder their achievement and their path into adulthood. This is a culture that many girls also live out, despite their increasingly high achievement. There are particular concerns about the 'tail' of male under-achievement. These concerns need to be addressed by creative interventions to make learning more attractive, and closer to leisure pursuits, allegiances and passions than it is at present. Numerous reports show that male under-achievement may also be compounded by ethnicity among some ethnic groups (Owen *et al.* 2000). We need to create a learning and achievement culture that offers clear rewards.

## Young people leaving care

The low level of qualifications among young people leaving care is recognised. However, there are proposals to help care leavers that the LSC might work with. These include financial incentives, such as the proposal to help young people who have not received child benefit by providing a lump sum that would be ring-fenced for learning, finding a home or other encouragements to 'inclusion'.

## Prisoners

Prisoners of all ages make up another major population of potential learners. The Home Office and DfES are now working together to address the key issues. These are:

- high levels of poor basic skills (over 60% of prisoners have a basic skills problem)
- the split between education and training
- poor and outdated work-related training
- the financial disincentives to prisoners who engage in education as part of the 'work' regime in prisons.

In the past, sewing mailbags paid better money than learning. There is now a real opportunity for change with the learning and skills councils working closely with the Prisoners' Learning and Skills Unit, providers, prison governors and Nacro to support learning during imprisonment and in the critical period of re-entering society after release.

## Those with basic skills needs

There is a daunting adult basic skills deficit in the UK. It is an urgent challenge to tackle it by attracting new learners. Clearly, there is a vast terrain to cross to achieve a level of skill in the adult population defensible in a modern civil society and advanced economy. People must be able to read, write, speak and listen in English and use numbers effectively in their daily lives – and be able to improve these skills.

The task is formidable, even though the research evidence used by Moser (DfEE 1999), which points to 7m adults with basic skills difficulties, may overstate the problem. Further work is needed. The government has accepted the report and set up a new unit to tackle the problem. The targets set ask for 3.5m people's problems to be significantly less within 10 years. The numbers of people whose lives are blighted by basic skills deficits and who would respond to a literacy campaign may hopefully be considerably lower than this. Many people more than get by without perfect spelling or maths. And basic skills can be differently supported (and hidden) in the computer age.

Research suggests that to attract people who are 'disengaged' it is crucial to respect what they know, do and want (Taylor 2000). Even though there is a correlation with poverty, unemployment and vicious cycles of low achievement in families and communities, pitying and pathologising people with basic skills needs will not bring them in. Many people need to be attracted by alternative learning, which supports their own goals or triggers their enthusiasm, creates a positive self-image and enables people better to act in their own interests. This includes the prospect of a better job and greater confidence. We will only meet the basic skills targets by providing positive messages and by incorporating basic skills in the wider curriculum and in innovative learning opportunities.

The basic skills target is unlikely to be fulfilled without some very creative thinking about what constitutes basic skills. Alignment with key skills would be helpful here, as would other proxies of competence in learning in work, in the family and in the community. The likelihood of meeting the target will also be significantly boosted if the literacy and numeracy initiatives in schools are successful in raising standards in the coming 5–10 years.

# Strategies for attracting new learners

This section looks at some of the strategies that could be used to attract new learners.

## Starting points

**Starting from what learners want**

There is much evidence, particularly from Scandinavian countries and Australia, that public funding to stimulate participation need not be too prescriptive to be effective (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation 1999). The Further and Higher Education Act of 1992, the loss of local education authority funding for non-qualification adult learning and the narrowly focused Manpower Services Commission regimes of the 1980s led to bureaucratic, prescriptive and narrow approaches to what was viewed as legitimate learning. OECD reports and other studies suggest that where permissive adult learning schemes support people to determine their own learning, this can help to build civil society and active citizenship (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation 1999).

This has, it is argued, a positive impact on skill levels and employability. We are now free of the schedule 2/non-schedule 2 divide that has restricted choices for adults. In any new arrangements we need assurances of value for money and we need to make sure that learning is recorded and recognised. However, learning from Scandinavian countries, in particular, shows that a lighter touch and a simpler system, in which the state funds learning that goes with the grain of what people want, regardless of its immediate economic utility, can reap dividends for skills and employability. The argument goes that building a civil society, or developing 'social capital', helps to build a healthy economy. They are not entirely separate spheres. The growth of participation in leisure activity, health, technology and creative pursuits suggests that links with other government departments could play a useful role. NIACE's work on the positive impact of learning on physical and emotional health, particularly among older learners, suggests an area of demand that would offer real value for money (Aldridge and Lavender 2000).

**Starting from communities**

There is a need to target communities and groups as well as individuals. Over the past decade we have become almost exclusively focused on individuals. 'Individual commitment' has been a policy priority. Market-focused approaches have been predicated on individual 'customers' for learning. However, some of the most successful efforts have focused on community and family learning. Such initiatives can tackle negative pressures, which act as a counterweight to individual interest. An example of such negative pressure is families reluctant to allow their children to go into training at about £40 a week if it means they lose some child benefit or housing benefit.

Learning in communities can be a trigger to begin solving some of the problems of deprived communities. This is embedded in the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy (Social Exclusion Unit 2001). For example, neighbourhood learning centres, run by local people, can offer attractive courses to tempt adults back into learning, thus helping them compete for nearby jobs and indirectly nurturing local businesses. Education Action Zones have similarly targeted educationally disadvantaged communities with programmes to raise aspirations and achievement, working not only through schools, but also with parents and families. An important concept underlying this kind of work is that the motivation to learn is more likely to be created and sustained if the will to succeed is shared by families and communities.

Closely linked to the idea of using communities and groups as the focus for stimulating demand is that of community leadership. Again, the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy has enthusiastically embraced the concept of 'community capacity building' – investing in people's capacity to help themselves. The Widening Participation Strategic Partnerships, funded by the FEFC in the wake of the Kennedy Report (Kennedy 1997), have shown the kinds of results that can be gained by training 'community link workers'. Link workers are recruited from neighbourhoods where participation in learning is low, to promote learning opportunities in their own communities.

**Starting from interest groups**

There is huge potential for stimulating demand through unleashing the learning in existing interest groups, membership organisations, social and humanitarian movements and some forms of enterprise. These are nurseries in which more knowledge and skills related learning can be cultivated. They already practise active citizenship and volunteering. Such groups not only have huge potential but also a 200-year track record of success in stimulating and supporting learning, building on people's allegiances, passions and commitment.

Although there is evidence of a long-term decline in membership, volunteering and active citizenship, there is now evidence of recent vigorous regrowth (Yeo 2000). Such organisations include faith communities, cooperatives, mutuals and social enterprises, voluntary organisations, credit unions, trade unions, women's organisations, tenants' associations, residents' organisations such as Neighbourhood Watch, environmental and other local groups. Nowadays, these groups may be both local and global, because the internet challenges physical locality as the necessary meeting point. There is an enabling role here for the state in helping the learning that happens within a wider purpose to be recognised, recorded and appropriately supported.

**Starting from existing knowledge and skills**

Stephen Jay Gould, the Harvard professor whose writing has helped to bridge the gap between science and the wider culture, has highly relevant things to say about potential demand. He argues that millions of people love science and practise it, 'learning the feel of true expertise in a chosen expression'. He lists the sophisticated knowledge of underwater ecology among tropical fish enthusiasts (in the USA, mainly blue-collar males); the horticultural knowledge of millions of those in gardening clubs (mainly older middle-class women); the astronomical learning of telescope enthusiasts; and, most obviously to millions of parents, 'the mental might' included in the classification and correct spelling, of 'hideously complex dinosaur names' among 5 year olds (Gould 2000).

Gould's point is that if millions of people, of all ages and classes, recognised the status of their activity and knowledge as science, 'democracy would shake hands with the academy', and the state might 'harvest' their fascination with knowledge 'in the service of more general education'. Gould's use of the word science is telling. Science in Britain is thought to be for the few – seen as difficult and 'arcane'. The German word 'Wissenschaft' (meaning both knowledge and science) allows us to think about science and technology in ways that could help build a more inclusive society through learning.

At a more practical level, learning of the kind described above could be recognised and accredited ('harvested') as 'prior learning', building confidence and bridges across to the learning needed for economic and social development.

**Starting from people's habits and desires**

We need to learn from the habits and desires of people – especially disengaged younger people. The Foyer Federation, which helps homeless and disadvantaged 16–25 year olds, has reported that up to 80% of homeless young people use mobile telephones. Text messaging is a rapidly growing form of communication which has potential as a learning medium. The Learning and Skills Development Agency, together with UK and other European partners, has embarked on an EU-funded 3-year study into the potential of hand-held devices (including computer games, palm-tops and new-generation mobile telephones) for small chunks of learning.

## Joining up the present system

A concerted effort to promote participation in learning is needed, orchestrated at national level but properly 'joined up' with local-level information and provision of opportunities. The LSC structure and local reach, when combined with its knowledge of the needs of different target groups, has great potential to achieve both balance and coherence.

There is a need to promote simple messages and common language to create familiarity and public understanding. There is a long history of relatively small and sometimes competing initiatives by different organisations. This has diluted the power of campaigns. Government departments/policy units often take different approaches. One initiative can cut across another. Time and post-hoc thinking and effort is needed to stitch them together. Coherence is crucial to meeting demanding National Learning Targets.

Shared vision and coordination will be needed at the conception and design stage. Government-sponsored local learning centres, which have their origins in different policy initiatives and cultures, provide an example of how challenging it can be to join up individual initiatives later on. Another example is Learning Partnerships (DfES). It is now important to articulate these with Regional Development Agencies, local LSCs and Local Strategic Partnerships. Learning Partnerships, provided they are inclusive and more than 'provider cartels', have real potential to stimulate demand and support local LSCs with vital bottom-up intelligence to inform planning.

## Media

Major, coordinated media campaigns at national level are needed, targeting defined groups with known needs. Big media campaigns can work, but they need time to build up; they need to be carefully focused on target audiences and they need critical mass. A powerful campaign needs to use popular programmes in tandem with specialised slots. It needs to be broadcast during prime time and be highly entertaining in order to touch chords in different target groups.

In the UK, the BBC is best positioned to be the powerful national mobiliser of demand, fulfilling its role and responsibility as a public-sector, values-driven organisation. It has the know-how and the resources. It can pull in stars. It does not need to sell. It can promote learning in the interests of the country as a whole. Three educational campaigns have outstripped all others in finding their way into people's hearts and minds – changing consciousness. In the first two the BBC had the lead role, in the third it was a key partner:

- The 1970s *On the Move* programmes (BBC) addressed adult basic skills. They remain a prime example of raising national consciousness of a fundamental social and educational issue. The programmes successfully encouraged both participation and large-scale volunteering to meet the demand that was generated. That the supply-side was unable to sustain provision to solve the problem in the long term, as evidenced by the Moser report (DfEE 1999), does not lessen what was achieved by the media campaign.
- *Computers Don't Bite* (BBC) was outstandingly successful in raising awareness. Successful awareness raising was followed-up with practical learning initiatives like *Webwise*.
- Adult Learners Week was founded in 1991 by NIACE. This focused week of promotional activity involves the BBC, independent television, helplines and events. Adult Learners Week has been successfully taken up in a number of other countries in Europe, Australasia and the Middle East, and has spawned further successful weeks in the UK.

## Marketing

A targeted media campaign at national level needs to be supported by related marketing drives at a local level. Marketing was a key development area in the growth-orientated period in further education after 1993, and in the Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) era through the joint promotion of the work-based route. Marketing culture has never taken root in adult and community learning. In further education, the culture of marketing waned and then was replaced by 'widening participation', which was initiative- and project-led and used outreach techniques to reach its target groups. A serious flaw in the marketing of the early 1990s was its collapse into advertising and selling learning. This approach, adopted by government, FE colleges and TECs, is arguably not appropriate to the product. There is little evidence to show that it contributed to growth or repaid the costs involved.

The applicability of branding as a concept for stimulating learning demands a degree of scepticism. The Ufi (University for Industry) is a major experiment here and may change the track record of the past, in which initiatives, such as the branding of Youth Credits, were not entirely successful. This might be because, in the case of learning, the marketing of a brand is not closely enough attached to the actual, complex 'product' or the diverse factors that motivate people to participate.

There is a strong case for a new emphasis on direct marketing using sophisticated techniques to promote radical new approaches to learning, based on the known aspirations of different groups of people, and the payback to them from learning. Powerful and sophisticated back-up tools can now support modern direct marketing techniques: for example, databases can be used to track and analyse enquiries, participation patterns, progression routes and the destinations of learners. Call centres can offer information, advice and guidance, but can also be two-way, enabling follow-up calls to enquiries and even cold calling to appropriate markets, such as employers or previous learners who might want to 'top-up' their skills.

Relationship marketing is another new approach that is appropriate to learning and quite distinct from advertising and selling. Interestingly, there are lessons to learn here from that group of providers least experienced in what some have called marketing (much of which, as noted, has in fact been advertising). These are the adult and community-based learning providers in the voluntary sector. There has long been strong recognition among them of the key elements that draw people in. These have included building trust and offering 'bite-sized chunks' of learning to enable people to build confidence before moving on to further learning or work. Word-of-mouth reputation leads to 'selling on' or 'repeat business' and the creation of loyal users across generations in families and communities. There is evidence that this approach has actually been the most successful for college recruitment, despite heavy investment in slogans on buses and glossy prospectuses.

## Engaging employers

The contribution of learning to economic development has been a focus of policy for the past decade (Report of the Commission on Public Policy and British Business 1997). The willingness of employers to support their employees' learning is crucial in attracting new learners.

**Developing a better system of vocational education**

Chris Hughes, Chief Executive of the Learning and Skills Development Agency, has argued that the lack of a strong vocational education system linked to business and industry hinders continued participation in learning and helps to keep skills levels low. OECD reports confirm the lack of coherence in UK vocational education and training (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation 1999, 2000). It is complex and weak compared with some other countries. This is not just about the pride of place that academic learning undoubtedly has in our culture and the real need to build esteem for vocational education. It is also about the need to develop skills appropriate to the economy and employability and to build into our national post-16 system strong, active working practices between providers and employers, creating a sense of membership of the system by employers and employees. A new 'public settlement' about the importance and role of vocational education is needed at all levels.

**Overcoming employers' reluctance to commit to employees' learning**

John Field, at Warwick University, has focused on the need to encourage employers to *want* learning for their employees (Field 2000). There are obstacles in the way of this. The Widening Participation partnerships have noticed employer reluctance to get involved in learning initiatives, particularly for low-skilled employees, because they fear it will create demands for higher wages and give employees the skills to seek work elsewhere. There are, however, models that show how investment in learning helps to retain staff.

**Carrots and sticks**

If employers cannot be won over by persuasion, we need an open debate about carrots and sticks – levies, tax incentives and support for in-house training. Investors in People (IiP) has made a significant impact, but less so at the lower skill levels.

The business case for employers must be there to provide hard evidence for engaging in a culture of learning. Some argue that the voluntary, persuasive approach has not worked. Employers are required to abide by legislation on health and safety, sex and racial discrimination, but it is considered impossible to make training a requirement. The outcome appears to be that the best qualified have most access to training, leaving the skills gap to widen. We need to interpret lessons from other countries to take the debate forward.

**Small and medium-sized enterprises**

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for about 95% of numbers of businesses in the UK. In education policy circles, the dominant view of SMEs is of organisations that are 'failing' in relation to training and educating their staff. This is problematic. SMEs are a notoriously diverse sector ranging from individual lifestyle or 'micro' businesses to companies employing hundreds of people. The smaller SMEs are crucial for economic development and a better picture from sound research is needed of how they recruit, and of their attitudes to low-skilled staff as well as to professional staff and to their own learning needs as entrepreneurs. We need to know how their supply chains could be improved by learning; what learning happens on the job; and what help they need from providers of education and training to help them become better managers, strategists, innovators, producers and marketers.

## Engaging employees

Even with employer support, measures are needed that will attract employees into learning.

**Employee development programmes**

Workplace learning practices are diverse. The Ford Employee Development Assistance Programme (EDAP) and other company schemes to support individual learning show that people like to learn in the workplace and that there is value to employers and employees in learning for personal development as well as job-related training (Parsons *et al.* 1998). In some schemes, such as Ford, the joint ownership of the scheme by the employer and the union has contributed significantly to its success.

A motivational factor is that employers, even with small amounts of financial support, sponsor the learning. Companies value the motivational impact of such schemes on the workforce.

**Trade unions**

The Trade Union Learning Fund has been highly successful in stimulating employee participation. It is a good foundation on which to grow employee interest. Unions have also been successfully engaging with individual learning accounts. There is training for shop stewards and officials. Prominent among these is the UNISON Open College. The TUC has actively supported a number of national initiatives, including IiP and individual learning accounts. They are key partners in stimulating demand (UNISON 2000).

**Guarantees**

Employees want clear links from training to work. Training schemes that offer guaranteed jobs in exchange for successfully completing the course appear to work well in deprived neighbourhoods. This approach blends carrot and stick, but the benefits to the learner, and the 'deal', are clear from the start.

**Study in paid time**

In some countries, paid educational leave, for example to take a school-leaving certificate as an adult, has been successful. The history of paid educational leave and in-work-time education in the UK is patchy with few legal rights to learning at work. It is obvious that learning takes time, and people in work have little spare time. However, there are now creative possibilities for funding learning as part of work-related legislation without alienating employers by 'too much, too soon', especially at a time when the national minimum wage has increased.

**The corporate university**

Some companies, for example Unipart, have corporate universities that directly link learning to company success. Front-line workers are seen to be critical. The learning is not academic nor freely chosen, but often leads to innovative practices that have a direct impact on profits. A key issue is ensuring take-up of learning at all levels in the workforce. To date, work-based learning has been focused disproportionately on more highly qualified and more senior staff.

## Financing learning

We have to raise demand without the state paying for all post-19 learning. State support will be targeted on clear priorities and linked to national targets. Individuals seem to invest when they are clear that there are direct benefits. The driving licence is the obvious example. This suggests that the notion of a 'licence to practise' is worth exploring further, especially in employment. Many people do not undertake learning for its own sake. They want to see clearly where it will take them. We discuss various financial barriers and incentives to learning in the following sections.

### Transport

The Learning and Skills Development Agency has carried out research on support with the costs of transport for post-16 students. This shows that availability of support is fragmented and variable. Although researchers such as Claire Callender (1999) have shown that transport is one of the major costs affecting younger students, the amount of support available, and the conditions under which it is offered, depends largely upon the accident of where one lives (Fletcher and Kirk 2000). Despite its potential importance as a barrier to access, there are few studies of the impact of transport costs upon participation. This may be remedied by a large study, recently commissioned by the DfES, which is reviewing transport policy in relation to young people, adults and individuals with special needs. The study is expected to report in October 2001.

### Loans

The Learning and Skills Development Agency has examined the potential for a system of loans to support participation in lifelong learning. Work with focus groups suggests that some learners would welcome the availability of a loan. It also shows that they were much more likely to contemplate one that was income contingent, like the current loans in higher education. In this model, learners only repay the loan if income exceeds a certain threshold. This finding possibly explains why 'career development loans', which have been available to adults outside the higher education sector for over a decade, have made little impact, their numbers averaging around 12,000 per year (Fletcher 2001).

### Fees

An emerging policy issue for the UK is to review the logic that underpins policy on fees. The mechanism as currently applied makes use of very broad categories of learners. No one under the age of 19 is charged fees. Adults on vocational programmes are charged around 25% of the costs, unless they are receiving means-tested benefits, when they are charged no fees. In adult and community learning, there is no consistent policy, though some learners are charged a substantial proportion of the costs – often as high as 80%. The subsidy made available to adult learners through the remission or partial remission of fees is the largest single element of public support for adult learners. It is therefore a matter of considerable importance – and urgency – to establish equitable and effective arrangements that give adults the incentive to participate.

### Individual learning accounts

The development of a national framework of individual learning accounts (ILAs) offers both a spur towards developing a fees policy and a means by which a more sensitive approach might be implemented. After an initial 1m accounts have been opened, with a cash contribution from the government of £150 in return for an individual investment of £25, the system will operate through fee discounts. Currently, discounts of 80% for IT courses and 20% for others are available, but there is still potential for discrimination. A system of discounts only makes sense in the context of a transparent and rational fees policy. At present, the discounts operate over both subsidised learning and skills provision and unsubsidised private provision, and there is no safeguard against either class of provider tailoring fees to the discounts available (SWA Consulting 1999).

### The incidental costs of learning

Learning accounts enable the financial support for the learner to be tailored more closely to the individual's learning biography. Support with the direct costs of learning through discounts could be allied with a learner's eligibility for grants and loans for learning that meets national priorities. For example, to implement the suggestion of the National Skills Task Force, that adults who have not obtained an initial qualification at Level 2 should receive maximum public support, would need a system that could identify who had reached Level 2 and who had not.

Learning accounts could also be used to help distribute support with the indirect costs of learning.

which can be substantial. According to Claire Callender's research (1999), 'Students spent an average £600 during the academic year on course-related expenditure ... 70% of all students experienced problems meeting these costs.'

**Saving to learn**

The Learning and Skills Development Agency is leading research into how people pay for learning and, in particular, patterns of saving and spending during different periods of an individual's life. The research involves the financial services sector, and proposes that all sectors of education and training are considered together. Investment in learning cannot be wholly understood without looking at intergenerational transfers, and how individuals and families prioritise investment in themselves and their children (Corney and Brown 2001).

The study is relevant to the emerging government interest in 'Asset Based Welfare' which seeks to help people out of poverty and dependency by supporting them to save and invest in learning, housing or starting a business. The announcement in April 2001 of proposals for a Child Trust Fund or 'Baby Bond', together with the less well-publicised Saving Gateway represent radical moves by the present government to promote long-term investment in learning and other opportunities (HM Treasury 2001) and change attitudes and expectations.

**Funding following learners**

More research is needed on the links between financial circumstances and people's engagement in learning. Callender and her colleagues have improved our understanding of the financial issues faced by learners, first in higher education and more recently in further education (Callender 1999). But they concede that we still do not know enough about the impact of these circumstances. For this reason the Learning and Skills Development Agency is giving priority to a systematic review of the relevant literature, as the first of a planned series of collaborative reviews with the DfES' Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Coordinating Centre (EPPI).

**Learning from others**

We need to learn from other countries, including the USA, where the impact of financial support arrangements is well researched. There is also some emerging evidence in the UK. Recent experience with the introduction of Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) for pilot groups of 16–19 year olds in full-time education suggests that financial incentives to participate have a measurable effect upon young people from poor households, particularly boys and particularly in rural areas.

**Financial barriers to participation**

Current financial barriers to participation appear to be most acute for adult learners outside the HE sector. For those under the age of 19 there is a developing system of maintenance allowances, and a policy of not charging fees. For those in higher education there is a system of loans and grants, which provide support with fees and maintenance. For adults outside the HE sector there are few financial support arrangements, either for the unwaged or for those in low-paid work. For many, involvement is maintained precariously by stretching the rules of the benefit system and remaining ostensibly ready and available for work.

**Course support**

In the last couple of years there have been welcome innovations in the rules governing which courses are eligible for support from public funds, at least as far as adults are concerned. Pilot schemes have allowed colleges to offer non-qualification courses consisting of units of qualifications, courses of as little as 3 hours in length (the previous limit was 9 hours) and courses that provide further fee discounts for low-paid employees (ILA discount schemes). The Learning and Skills Development Agency has been active in evaluating most of the initiatives and is about to commission a research synthesis exercise to identify common lessons that could be learnt. While each of the initiatives has shown some stimulus to participation, the results are variable. Freedom to offer non-examination courses in 'bite-sized chunks' may not be the universal answer to stimulating demand. We need debate about this key issue, and should not be afraid to challenge accepted beliefs about patterns of adult learning. The advent of ICT (information and communications technologies) may offer more systematic, long-term engagement with learning rather than, as has been assumed, the vehicle for ever-smaller 'chunks' (O'Shea 2000).

The direct costs of learning are not the only financial barriers facing potential learners. The work of Callender (1999) has shown that for young learners in further education the costs of transport can be substantial. Adult learners face similar costs with transport and many also have to spend substantial sums on childcare.

## Reforming the supply-side

**Initial education**

Many people argue that we have an inadequate initial education system that fails too many people. Relatively poor qualifications at 18, divisive class attitudes and cultures, a buoyant independent schools sector, low attendance and high drop-out levels, low occupational and basic skills levels all appear to bear this out. Naomi Sargeant (Sargeant 2000) reports that the length of initial education continues to be the clearest forward indicator of participation in adult learning. The RSA's *Redefining work* report (Bayliss 1998) argues, as do others, for an end to GCSE to stimulate staying on rates. The strategies to improve literacy and numeracy in schools, raise standards, create stronger early years education and support family learning are ambitious policies that aim to address the issues for the long term. The academic/vocational divide starts in initial education. Increasing the profile and improving the quality of vocational opportunities in schools could counteract this.

The economic advantages of addressing initial education are clear. Getting it wrong in the compulsory phase means that we end up paying for expensive post-school remedial interventions, providing constant support to economically and socially fragile groups, and continually grappling with low skills in the economy. It is right to take an optimistic approach to school reform, while continuously evaluating and acting to support the evidence of rising standards.

**Promoting vocational education**

The DfES' proposals for some post-16 providers to focus more exclusively on vocational excellence – leading to successful Level 3 learning and beyond (much as sixth form teaching has focused on academic excellence) has potential as a vehicle to raise participation levels post-16 (DfEE 2000c; Hughes and Smeaton 2001). Mission drift in general FE colleges pursuing diversity and comprehensive approaches has resulted in insufficient growth. At the same time, vocational and occupationally specific learning has lost focus. Vocational education could be better delivered by a defined, high-profile segment of learning and skills providers who would specialise in vocational skills delivered in close partnership with key sectors of business and industry. This could encourage demand from vocationally motivated learners. Work-based learners could be offered a range of off-the-job training and development at such institutions, for example on Modern Apprenticeships (MAs). Specialised, trained and updated staff capable of industry-standard delivery would be an essential bedrock of such provision. To stimulate demand and esteem, a national awards system for work-based learning could be considered, for example extending the 'UK Skills' initiative.

**Dealing with jargon**

There is a dense jungle of complex terms in education and training. For example, we have basic skills and key skills. Does the public know the difference? Do learners? Do parents? Do teachers? It is safe to say that none of the first three do. Most worrying perhaps is that teachers also are unclear. There is real confusion. Basic skills talks about 'literacy and numeracy'. Key skills talks about 'communication and application of number'. Learners in both key and basic skills need the wider skills of problem-solving, working with others and learning to learn. To help align key and basic skills, there have been very helpful approaches by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in designing the standards and specifications of the two areas (QCA 2000). But do we need two overlapping curriculum areas that cover absolutely essential territory and are clearly a continuum? The reasons for resisting a single set of skills are largely historical and political. Why not call them both key skills? Then we could educate the public with one voice about the opportunities that having these skills can bring. This would be a powerful set of skills to promote – with no social stigma attached.

## Qualifications

How many qualifications should there be? The history of qualifications development in England has been like 'Topsy' – it just grew. It is generally accepted that we need a clear, simple, intelligible qualifications framework for compulsory education and for national qualifications for 16–19 year olds. There is a need to establish a much simpler qualifications system, building developments on trusted brands. Reforming GNVQ to become the 'vocational A-level' is a sensible alignment of a new and still relatively unknown qualification with a valued brand. There should be a full debate about the value of GCSEs. Do they lead to too many people leaving education and training at 16, never to return? The 'foundation degree' has real potential to develop the degree for new groups of learners building on a product that is fully recognised and accepted.

However, are the majority of the 17,000 or so vocational, occupational and recreational qualifications, which have been eligible for funding in recent times,

a bad thing? The fundamental question is what will most help raise demand, without compromising the occupational standards being developed by national training organisations. Vocational and occupational qualifications could be more closely aligned.
For adults, should we be reducing qualifications by top-down rationalisation, or allowing and celebrating the diversity and creativity that enables people to pursue tailor-made qualifications and allows occupational sectors to use the qualifications they trust and so engage employers' trust and ownership?
Qualifications fill gaps in the market. For example, the travel industry prefers trainees to study for ABTAC and IATA qualifications rather than NVQs. Only two airline pilots prepared for an NVQ last year in preference to the established qualification.
Are qualifications a screen for gatekeepers or an enabler for individuals and employers? Are they inclusive or exclusive? This is a genuine dilemma that needs further debate.

For adults, including young 'delayers', young people who have been disengaged, and work-based adult learners, the development of the Ufi, unitised and credit-based approaches, flexibility to meet the market, and the funding of provision that does not lead to qualifications, should all help stimulate demand and appropriate measures of achievement. Here Britain is ahead of European neighbours who have more limited centralised, school-based qualifications. A spur to unitisation and a credit-based system would help demand by offering flexibility to adults, regardless of the number of qualifications (Tait 1998).

Constant change makes promotion difficult. There is evidence that it takes a decade or more for a qualification or a new language delivery system to be understood and accepted. The last decade and a half has seen repeated change and reform. New qualifications, new jargon and new curricula are constantly created, replaced or renamed. The public simply cannot keep up. Professionals and the public speak different languages. The FE college is still known as the 'Tech'. GCSEs took years to oust O-levels from people's minds. It is not surprising therefore that A-levels are sacrosanct as a valued qualification. It would be difficult to imagine change on the scale we have here occurring in Germany or France, where the Abitur and the Baccalauréat are trusted.

## The quality of teaching and learning

In the 21st century, quality in teaching and learning is less likely to mean imparting information and more likely to mean support, guidance, inspiration, developing creativity and interaction through technology. Learner autonomy will be a central concept. We know a lot about why students stay the course or leave. The most significant factors are good initial information, advice and guidance, and being placed on the right learning programme at the outset (Martinez and Munday 1998). But attention needs to turn to teaching and learning. Most of post-16 teaching is adequate, but it can be mediocre, boring and dictated by assessment regimes. To verify this, we should ask the learners. Enthusing and inspiring people has not been top of the agenda – but all successful learners can remember inspirational teachers. Much disaffection begins at 14, with negative feelings and a sense of failure related to GCSE selection. It is difficult to support learners' enthusiasm and learning styles in the short, rigidly timetabled lessons that dominate provision.

Some of the new technologies have huge potential for more interactive, experimental learning. We are still only at the beginning of this process of change, but the potential for technologies in attracting new learners and enabling them to learn in ways that suit them are enormous. Major developments are under way in increasing access to ICT in learning centres and colleges. This needs to be promoted widely to stimulate demand and reduce the 'digital divide' between learning haves and have-nots. Sargeant (2000) reports that a quarter of all adults who are learning are studying computing. This suggests latent demand. If providers are to attract learners, especially young learners, there needs to be continuous investment in up-to-date technology and its application to learning. The pace of technological change will accelerate. The system needs to be ready to adapt continually. Learners will quickly assess whether providers are ahead of the game and can add value to their prior learning.

# Actions for stakeholders

What are the priorities for key stakeholders in attracting new learners?

## The media

Develop a national media campaign, led by the BBC, which:

- celebrates diverse types of learners and learning
- entertains
- draws on role models
- is embedded in wider TV and radio programming including drama and soap opera.

## Ufi/learndirect

Promote a national drive to market learning, linked to new approaches to provision. Exploit more fully the marketing opportunities offered by new technologies and invent more imaginative, creative ways of attracting new learners.

## Learning Partnerships

Learning Partnerships should ensure they are widely inclusive of user interests and develop their role in assisting the local LSCs.

## Employers

A carefully researched strategy to engage employers is required. Years of persuasion and encouragement have had only partial success, especially among SMEs. Much action has been based on a generalised impression of what 'employers' (a highly differentiated category) want. Targeted pilot schemes and interventions based on analysis and evidence should precede a full debate about further incentives or levies.

## Voluntary and community organisations

Harness the allegiance of groups to voluntary and community organisations as a focus for learning.

## Mentors

Develop mentoring schemes, building on the Connexions personal adviser role, the neighbourhood renewal idea of community learning champions and minority ethnic mentors.

## Other government departments

DfES and the LSC need to initiate joined-up thinking with other government departments that can promote and create learning opportunities, particularly the departments of Health; Culture, Media and Sport; the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

# Glossary

**ABTAC** Association of British Travel Agents Certificate (Advanced)

**Adult Basic Skills Strategy**

A government-led strategy comprising a range of initiatives coordinated by a unit within the DfES to reduce the number of adults in England with poor literacy and numeracy skills

**A-level** Advanced level qualification

**BBC** British Broadcasting Corporation

**DfES** Department for Education and Skills

**DTI** Department of Trade and Industry

**DTLR** Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions

**EMA** Education Maintenance Allowance

The government set up pilot schemes in September 1999 to test whether a financial incentive to young people from low-income families will encourage more to stay on in learning beyond 16. Young people living in the pilot areas will be eligible to receive an EMA, depending on parental taxable income, if they attend full-time courses at school or college

**EPPI** Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Coordinating Centre

A DfES-funded research centre

**FE** Further education

**FEFC** Further Education Funding Council

Funded the FE sector institutions from April 1993 to March 2001

**GCSE** General Certificate of Secondary Education

**GNVQ** General National Vocational Qualification

**IATA** International Air Transport Association

**IiP** Investors in People

A national quality standard that sets a level of good practice for improving an organisation's performance through its people

**ILAs** Individual learning accounts

First developed in 1999 by the government to offer people aged 19 and over the means to manage, plan and invest in their own learning and to take charge of their careers

**learndirect**

The Ufi's local learning centres, opened since November 1999 to provide online learning throughout England

**Learning Partnerships**

Established in 1999 in England to improve the planning and coherence of local post-16 learning. Learning Partnerships support action to widen participation in learning, to increase attainment, to improve standards and to regenerate local communities. They are developing local learning targets linked to the new National Learning Targets. Further education colleges, careers service companies, TECs (up to April 2001), local authorities, schools, other local organisations and employers are involved

**Local LSCs** Local learning and skills councils

47 regional councils set up in April 2001, replacing the TECs

**LSC** Learning and Skills Council

Replaced the FEFC in April 2001. Funds the post-16 education and training sector

**LSDA** Learning and Skills Development Agency

A strategic national resource for the development of policy and practice in post-16 education and training

**MAs** Modern Apprenticeships

Aimed at school and college leavers who could complete the training before the age of 25, they lead to at least an NVQ or Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) Level 3 and are available in over 60 industry and commerce sectors

**Nacro** The crime reduction charity

**National Curriculum**

Defines the minimum educational entitlement for pupils of compulsory school age. It sets out the requirements to be taught in each subject and at each key stage of the school curriculum

**National Framework**

Qualifications in the National Framework are arranged in six levels, Entry and Levels 1–5: Level 1 Foundation; Level 2 Intermediate; Level 3 Advanced; Level 4 Higher; Level 5 Professional

**National Learning Targets**

Launched by the Education and Employment Secretary in October 1998 to provide a focus for raising attainment and participation in education and training for the key stages of people's lives at ages 11, 16, 19, 21 and on into adulthood

**National Skills Task Force**

Set up by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in 1997 to develop a National Skills Agenda. It was asked to provide advice on the nature, extent and pattern of skill needs and recruitment difficulties, and how to ease such problems. The Task Force's final report was produced in 2000

**Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy**

Developed by the government's Social Exclusion Unit, it suggests approaches to the problems of poor neighbourhoods, focusing on housing estates, crime, drugs, unemployment, community breakdown and schools

**New Deal**

Introduced in 1997 as part of the government's Welfare to Work strategy, the programme gives New Deal jobseekers a chance to develop their potential, gain skills and experience, and find work

**NIACE** National Institute for Adult Continuing Education

**Non-schedule 2**

Broadly, learning programmes not leading to qualifications and not funded by the FEFC. Under the LSC, from April 2001, there is no division between schedule 2 and non-schedule 2

**NVQ** National Vocational Qualification

**OECD** Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

**RSA** Royal Society of Arts

**Schedule 2**

Broadly, learning programmes leading to qualifications funded by the FEFC from 1992 to March 2001. 'Non-schedule 2' referred mainly to adult learning programmes which are not qualifications-based and were therefore not generally eligible for funding

**SMEs** Small- and medium-sized enterprises

**TECs** Training and Enterprise Councils

**Ufi** University for Industry

The public–private partnership behind learndirect, promoting the government's vision of a 'university for industry'

**UK** United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Includes England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

**Widening Participation Strategic Partnerships**

A total of 54 partnerships of local agencies funded by the FEFC from 1997 to 2000. They identified groups under-represented in further education and developed a range of strategies to engage these groups

**Youth Credits**

Piloted from 1991 and introduced throughout England and Wales in 1995 (and known as Skillseekers in Scotland), school leavers could obtain a credit to spend on training through a TEC (or a Local Enterprise Company in Scotland)

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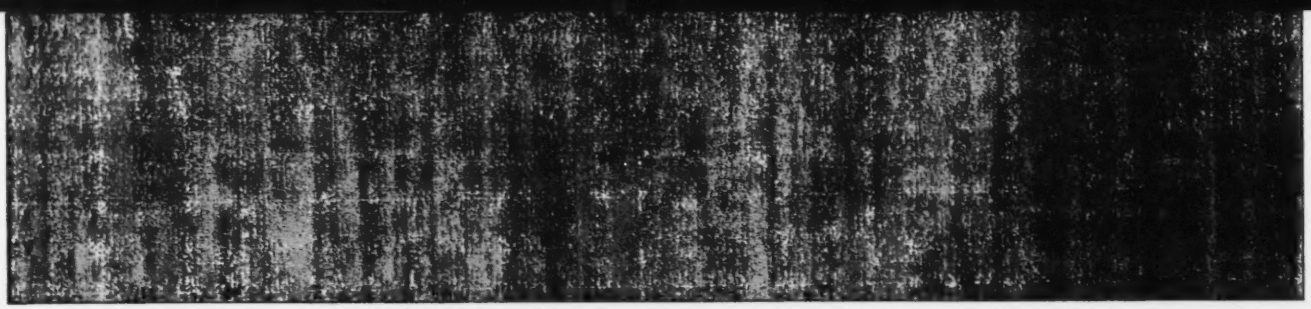

The UK needs to attract more people into education and training. A priority for the new Learning and Skills Council is to promote learning – increasing and widening participation. But how do we do this? This think-piece aims to stimulate debate amongst researchers, policy-makers and managers in the new learning and skills sector, drawing on ideas from the UK and other countries. Some of the underlying social and economic issues are highlighted, including: low skill levels, low adult participation, negative attitudes to learning and a confusing infrastructure for post-16 education. 'Reluctant' learners and groups that are under-represented in the post-16 sector are identified. The paper explores strategies for attracting new learners, involving communities, the media, marketing professionals, employers and others. Options for financing learning are also presented. To conclude, the paper presents a set of objectives for key stakeholders, stating their potential role in attracting new learners.

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